

NSB study shows rise in cancer rate

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In response to a perceived increase in cancer incidence of North Slope Borough Native residents (includes the villages of Atkasuk, Pt. Lay, Pt. Hope, Nuiqsut, Barrow, Anaktuvuk Pass, Kaktovik and Wainwright); monies were appropriated from the State of Alaska to the North Slope Borough for a cancer

pared to all Alaska Natives, as well as to the total U.S. population, to provide a basic foundation for development of intervention and prevention strategies. With 15 years of experience in conducting Alaska Native cancer research, Dr. Anne Lanier, CDC, has been of great assistance in helping to guide the collection of research data.

Here is a summary of some of the data. Cancer incidence rates

compared with other Native people of the state. However, cancer is still a major concern due to the fact it is the 3rd leading cause of death among NSB Natives within the past 5 years (accidents, and heart disease and hypertension are 1st and 2nd respectively).

Lung cancer, without a doubt, is the number one cancer found

among NSB Native men, it also was the number one cancer-related killer. Unfortunately, there is no effective screening available and so by the time symptoms of lung cancer appear, the disease is very often incurable. Among cancer incidence in women, colorectal (intestinal) cancer was number one, but cer-

vical cancer, a cancer which is often completely "curable" when caught in its early stages, was a close second. Lung cancer was not seen in women during the 15 year period (1969-1983) but in 1984 and 1985 some cases did appear and it is projected more

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"Cancer is the third leading cause of death among North Slope Borough Natives..."

research project. Although research of mortality and morbidity of cancer-related illness has been performed in other Native population areas in Alaska, it had not been done in the NSB. The project is based out of the Arctic Investigations Laboratory, Centers for Disease Control (CDC), Anchorage, Alaska for the fiscal year of 1985.

Jennifer Williams, R.N., has been responsible for gathering statistical data relevant to NSB cancer mortality and morbidity rates. These rates have been com-

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Cancer on rise in NSB

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women will develop lung cancer due to the increase in tobacco use by women.

Although the mortality rate of cancer among NSB Natives is similar to that of all Alaska Natives, the incidence of cancer-related illness has increased over the past 15 years. A number of factors may attribute to this increase: Overall improved health

care which includes pre and postmortem diagnostic capabilities. In earlier times lack of access to diagnostic equipment and laboratories may have led people to attribute death to other causes rather than cancer. Longevity may also contribute to a perceived increase in cancer incidence and mortality. Since the chances of getting cancer increase with age, the longer one lives, the greater one's risk of getting

cancer. Change in lifestyle may also be a contributing factor. Alcohol use, diet, decreased activity level and stress have been associated with an increased risk of cancer morbidity, as well as

the use of tobacco products (Schotenfeld, 1982). Tobacco use is rampant in young and old alike, and appears in the form of chew, snuff, cigars and cigarettes. This is significant since the number one cancer found in NSB Native men is lung cancer and statistics have shown cigarette smoking to be related in approximately 90% of all lung cancers (American Cancer Society, 1984).

Although cancer-related illness

and death are not disproportionately high in NSB Natives residents compared with other Alaska Natives and the U.S. population, the types of cancer seen, are to quite a large extent, either preventable or curable when found early. For this reason the cancer research project has focused on prevention methods which will in time, hopefully, decrease lung and cervical cancer morbidity and mortality.